

# Oh, CIA, can you see?

By Dick Schaap

Did Oleg Penkovskiy have a spook for a ghost?

Did a CIA man—a "spook"—write *The Penkovskiy Papers*? Or are the *Papers*, now listed among the best-selling books, actually the personal observations of Colonel Oleg Penkovskiy, a Red Army officer who spied for the West and, as a result of his moonlighting, was tried and executed by the Soviet Union?

Doubts have been expressed about the authenticity of the *Papers* on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Such knowledgeable Westerners as John Le Carre and Stewart Alsop have argued that the *Papers*, while substantially accurate, are, if not a CIA creation, at least a CIA production. Pravda, less subtly, said the *Papers* are "a crude fabrication."

Penkovskiy himself, obviously, is in no position to defend the *Papers*. Nor is Peter Deriabin, the former Russian secret agent who is given credit—by Doubleday, if not by Pravda—for translating the *Papers*. Deriabin defected to the United States roughly a decade ago and chooses, for reasons of health, to change his name every few years and remain out of the public spotlight. The CIA, of course, is no help at all. Among authors craving personal publicity, the CIA ranks just behind J. D. Salinger.

This leaves Frank Gibney.

Gibney is the best available authority for the authenticity of the *Papers*. He wrote an introduction to them, plus a commentary on each section, and, in effect, edited the book. Gibney insists that, as far as he knows, the Central Intelligence Agency had nothing to do with *The Penkovskiy Papers* until he had finished assembling and annotating the manuscript. "Then it was sent to the CIA for checking," Gibney said the other day at his Manhattan home. "Sure they took some things out. I don't deny that."

Gibney is a candid man—he is willing to admit, for instance, that he has worked, as reporter, editor and speechwriter, for Henry Luce, Vincent Astor, Hugh Hefner, Huntington Hartford and Lyndon Johnson—but the problem is that the *Papers* could be a CIA production without his knowledge.

A 41-year-old, short, pleasant man, once the champion high school debater of New York City, Gibney's involvement with the *Papers* grew out of a term he served as a staff writer on *Life*. "In 1958," Gibney said, "Life learned there was a defector, surfaced and cleared, who was available for stories. He was Peter Deriabin. We did a series together for *Life*, and the series later became a book, *The Secret World*." (Gibney, who was assigned to the Office of Naval Intelligence during World War II, has also written books about Japan, Poland and white-collar crime in the United States.)

Out of the *Life* series and *The Secret World* came a friendship between Gibney and Deriabin. Gibney, through the late Congressman Francis Walters, helped Deriabin obtain American citizenship. Deriabin often visits Gibney's home, telephones him and sends him Christmas

cards. He likes to tell Gibney's children stories about the siege at Stalingrad. Yet Gibney maintains that he does not know Deriabin's phone number nor where he lives—and does not want to know. "It's strictly one-way traffic," Gibney said. "Peter gets in touch with me."

In November, 1962, Deriabin got in touch with Gibney and told him that he had obtained microfilms of the personal papers of Oleg Penkovskiy, a Russian who had been spying for the West with great effectiveness. Deriabin said the microfilms had been smuggled to the West. Gibney says he doesn't know exactly how they were brought out—although he imagines they followed Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* route—and he doesn't want to know that, either. "I didn't know who the hell the guy was," Gibney said. "I had never heard of Penkovskiy. I took Peter's word for everything. If Peter said he was a Russian and he was an agent, I believed it."

On December 11, 1962, in support of Deriabin's story, the Soviet Union announced it had arrested a man named O. V. Penkovskiy identified as a scientific worker who had passed secret Russian information to British and American sources. Gibney and Deriabin went to a lawyer named Herb Jacoby, a specialist in copyright law, and got Jacoby to set up a trust fund in Penkovskiy's name. The authors intended to put aside for Penkovskiy the bulk of any profits resulting from publication of the *Papers*. "We thought Penkovskiy might somehow get out at some time," Gibney said. "Peter, particularly, didn't want to be accused of profiteering."

Through 1963, while Penkovskiy and his British contact, businessman Greville Wynne, were tried and found guilty, Gibney and Deriabin kept the *Papers* quiet. Not until April, 1964, after Penkovskiy had been executed and Wynne had been traded to the West for Soviet spy Gordon Lonsdale, did Gibney go to work on the book in earnest. Gibney, who has a working knowledge of Russia but has never been to the Soviet Union, went away to Maine for two months and spent most of his time working on the introduction, using, besides the *Papers* themselves, the official

account of the Penkovskiy trial. Later, Gibney flew to England and had Wynne check over the manuscript. "Wynne made some corrections in the introduction," Gibney said, "but there are probably still some mistakes."

Gibney took the manuscript first to Harper & Row, then to New American Library, but neither publisher was eager to meet the asking price, a \$50,000 advance. Finally, Doubleday, which had published *The Secret World*, bought the *Papers*.

The book surfaced in November, 1965, exactly three years after Deriabin brought Gibney the *Papers*, and quickly climbed onto the best-seller lists.

One of the criticisms leveled against the book is that, while there are several photographs of Penkovskiy's family, his military documents and his calling cards, there are none of the original manuscript. This absence has fed the suspicion that the *Papers* are not authentic.

Gibney has photostats of dozens of the original Penkovskiy pages in his home. "And Peter has all the rest," he said. "We should have used some in the book, but Doubleday was in a rush to get it out, and the art director had gotten up layouts without the photostats. I didn't push. I never thought the authenticity would be questioned."

To the criticism that Penkovskiy would never simply hide the *Papers* in his desk, as the book says he did—Le Carre phrased the suspicion best: "Penkovskiy concealed the *Papers*, with Russian cunning, in his desk"—Gibney offers another rebuttal. "Guys talk," he said, "as if Penkovskiy was just sitting there waiting for a literary agent to show up. He did travel to the West a few times. He didn't keep a big manuscript just lying around."

The charge has also been made, more by Soviet critics than by Westerners, that Penkovskiy simply was not so important a spy as the *Papers* claim. Greville Wynne, in a New York press conference plugging the *Papers*, said, "Penkovskiy saved a war, in my opinion." Gibney will go almost as far. "I think he was the key to the Cuban situation," Gibney said. "We may have weathered the crisis without him, but I hate to think about it."

Neither Theodore Sorensen nor Arthur Schlesinger jr., in their JFK books, mentions Penkovskiy's role in Cuba, but Sorensen, questioned about it on television, would say only that he was glad the United States had intelligence successes once in a while. And Schlesinger, who worked for Gibney (as a Show magazine movie critic) at the same time he worked for President Kennedy, has never suggested to Gibney that the importance of Penkovskiy is exaggerated.

In his introduction to the *Papers*, Gibney flatly states, "Their [the *Papers*] authenticity is beyond question."

He has backed up only slightly since then. "Certainly it's possible that the CIA fed the material to Deriabin before I became involved," Gibney said. "It's one of many theoretical possibilities. But I find it difficult to believe it could have been fixed without my knowledge."

Pravda has announced that Gibney, in defending the *Papers*, is "like a tired fighter, swinging his gloves wildly . . . defending the CIA fabrications." Pravda's attack may be Gibney's best defense.

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